



Wire Transfer Scams Now Hitting Wisconsin Consumers

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MADISON – You are taught as a child not to talk to strangers...so would you wire money to one?

In April, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection received a rash of complaints from victims of wire fraud, with scammers taking between \$2,500 and \$16,000 from the victims. In three cases, the consumers were victims of the “grandparents scam.” The other two consumers were victims of a “Nigerian scam” and a “check-cashing scam.” These scam victims were often elderly and were from all around the state: Green Bay, Milwaukee, Madison and rural Grant County.

“Scammers love wire transfers because once they have convinced you to send money through these means, it’s nearly impossible to get the money back,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “By the time you realize you’ve been scammed, the criminals are long gone.”

There are endless variations on wire fraud scams, but the examples above occur frequently. Here is how they work:

- **Grandparents scam** – a scammer calls you claiming to be a relative in crisis (scammers usually claim to be a grandchild). They need money wired quickly in order to get them out of trouble. The scammer asks you to keep the money request a secret.
 - What is really going on? Your actual relative is safe and unaware that you are being pressured for money.
 - What should you do? Call the relative who is supposedly requesting help to verify the story. If you can’t reach the relative, call other family members and friends who may be able to contact the person. Many potential victims have avoided falling for this scam simply by placing a call to a relative for verification.
- **Nigerian email solicitation (or “advance-fee scam”)** – you receive an email from an individual claiming to be a business person, lawyer, doctor or royal in a foreign country (typically Nigeria or another African nation). They have a large sum of cash waiting for you if you wire them a fee to make the money available.
 - What is really going on? There is no money waiting for you. It is all a lie. Your email address has likely been taken from a chain email or purchased from a “sucker list.”
 - What should you do? Delete the email or forward it to the Federal Trade Commission at spam@uce.gov. Do not interact with the sender.
- **Check-cashing scams** – you receive a job offer (often for being a “mystery shopper”) that requires you to cash a check that is mailed to you. You are asked to send a portion of the money to another person and to keep the remainder. In other versions of this scam, someone offers to purchase an item from you, typically from a Craigslist.com or classified ad posting. The person wants to send you a check for much more than your asking price with the understanding that you will cash the check and wire them back the extra money.
 - What is really going on? The check is stolen or is a fake. If you cash it, you will be liable for paying the full amount back to the bank when the error is discovered.
 - What should you do? Never agree to deposit a check from someone you do not know.

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Again – if strangers ask you to wire them money, it is likely that you are being set up for a scam.

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, visit Consumer Protection's website at datcp.wisconsin.gov, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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